

PAPERS FOR WAR TIME. No. 7

THE WAR SPIRIT IN OUR
NATIONAL LIFE

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EXPLANATORY NOTE

GREAT BRITAIN is engaged in a war from which, as we believe, there was offered to our nation no honourable way of escape. The desire of all who love their country is to serve it in the hour of its need, and so to live and labour that those who have fallen in its service may not have died in vain. While this may suffice to make immediate duty clear, the war remains in the deepest sense a challenge to Christian thought. The present bitter struggle between nations which for centuries have borne the Christian name indicates some deep-seated failure to understand the principles of Christ and to apply them to human affairs.

This series of papers embodies an attempt to reach, by common thought, discussion and prayer, a truer understanding of the meaning of Christianity and of the mission of the Church to the individual, to society and to the world.

Those who are promoting the issue of these papers are drawn from different political parties and different Christian bodies. They believe that the truth they seek can be attained only by providing for a measure of diversity in expression. Therefore they do not accept responsibility for the opinions of any paper taken alone. But in spirit they are united, for they are one in the conviction that in Christ and in His Gospel lies the hope of redemption and health for society and for national life.

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EUROPE to-day reeks with horror, and no man can think truly about the situation who will not openly face the terrible facts.

Translated into detailed narratives, our succinct paragraphs of war news would become a sickening tale of sturdy lives dashed out in thousands, of mangled soldiers lying in torture, of blood and filth flung about with ghastly fury, of stinking trenches, foully poisoned areas, wrecked villages, homeless populations, and wasted countries.

It is true that shining streaks of chivalry, heroism, and inspired cheerfulness run through the black cloud of horror. Men in thousands are forgetting self, and lifting the life of the race by willing self-sacrifice. The spirit that is in man dares greatly, even in the face of all this devil's work. But even while we solace ourselves with these thoughts the blackness of the hour descends upon us again. What uncounted women weep to-day for the greatest of sorrows! What legions of little children have suffered a calamity they are too young to understand! What masses of men have only a maimed life before them now! What vile volumes of passion, lust, and fury have been let loose! What havoc has been made of the constructive labours of centuries! What sickening terror has seized and demoralized multitudes! What a world gone mad it is!

Slowly, but surely, the real truth is coming home to us. It is the foulest business the world has ever seen,

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the most consummate instance of corporate folly, well-nigh the blackest crime in mankind's story. Belgium is laid waste from end to end. France is sorely wounded. Germany and six other nations are being drained of the best of their men. The constructive business of Europe has been so dislocated that generations may not see it straightened again. The common sense of mankind is beginning to declare with horrified conviction that the whole thing is intolerable. Few escape the sense that the race, as a whole, is humiliated by such a happening. Without warning we have rushed and been crushed into this devil's carnival, and now stand horrified at the shame and cruelty of it.

Yet is it not also true that for generations we Europeans have laboured to make the intolerable thing possible? With vast care and at great sacrifice we have laid the mine that has now exploded. The ships, guns, shells, mines, horses, and men were all ready. The machine we elaborated has begun to work. That is all. The toll of millions and the thought of thousands is bearing its ordained fruit. That is all.

Such thoughts as these may well compel the question, Why did we do it? This calamity did not fall upon mankind from the skies. With infinite care we prepared it. In the face of a blood-bespattered Europe we may well ask, 'Why?' In the name of all our heartbroken women and fatherless children, 'Why?'

It must have been somewhere in our thought that we have been wrong. Some immense delusion must have fastened upon Europe. Right thinking and feeling do not produce fruits like these. If there be a God at all these things are not inevitable. We did not want this thing. We hate it now that it is here. All our better

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hopes and policies lie shattered. This is not the world we hoped for. Actual events are flouting our aspirations. We must have missed the way in which the real world can be constrained to work to good ends. We must have cherished amid all our best hopes some fatal and sinister principle. While we talked of progress and a godly civilization we must have harboured within us some evil spirit. And now that evil spirit has turned round to mock us. We stand aghast, we are eager to lay the immediate blame on others—and doubtless we can do this with justice. But none the less the roots of this horror lay in our own minds and hearts.

Nor, I believe, is it difficult to say what the fatal delusion has been. It is the idea that man's good comes to him by self-assertion, and that by labour in disregard of others we can make real progress. To the untutored spirit other spirits always seem a mere obstruction. In the first flush of his youth man rebels against the very existence of other opposing wills. They are in his way, and he would fain sweep them out of it. To curb his spirit and fit his personality into one system with other personalities seems mere humiliation. He must follow his own star. He rejoices to be alone. He is even willing to be against the world, if the world will not bend to him. And hence come wars.

To such a spirit, indeed, they are welcome when they come. They bring to him the glory and the thrill of a struggle for his own great self. He is glad when his spirit is braced in every nerve, and all his vital forces fall into line in one great struggle to be himself—let others be what they will. To get up on to the top, to shake off the cumbering fetters of other wills—that is the primal instinct of man.

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Nor are there lacking poets who can set to music the cries of man in that proud battle mood. There is a certain pagan splendour in it which makes some appeal to us all. We are inclined to think there must be some good in that masterful pose. Deep instincts that date from the Stone Age stir within us while such battles rage. The swish of the sword has a melody all its own.

But is there good in that mood? If it be good for men it must be good for nations. Is it good? Let the state of Europe to-day answer the question.

The truth is that this attitude of spirit contains within it the very negation of civilization. What real progress we have made has been accomplished because, first in the family, then in the city, and lastly in the State, we have learnt to curb our personalities within some method of life that made room for others also. We have got on just in proportion as we have achieved some community of will with others, and have accepted for ourselves the restrictions of co-operative life. We have got on where, from the first clash of opposing personalities, we have advanced to a corporate life that made room for all alike. We have got on just in so far as we have accepted the unwelcome fact of the existence of other people, with their rival claims, their contradictory notions, and their (to us) stupid ways. We have got on just in so far as each man has seen beyond 'My good' a greater thing yet to aim at, called 'Our good'—in so far as the individual has been merged in the body.

There are but two ways open to mankind. One is the way of rivalry, which must always mean intermittently a world splashed with blood, and a life made hideous by torture and ruin. The other is the way of corporate life, which is difficult, slow, and complex, but

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which holds within it the promise of the exaltation of a noble peace. Some men may open-eyed, even to-day, prefer the former way. To them this paper is not addressed. Most men, probably, are shrinking from that way to-day with a horror that is new in their experience. To them every day of our current history is declaring, 'Be sure of this: there is no way of life that will avoid these shames and follies except the path of corporate living, with all its disciplines and its humbling self-effacements'. We had forgotten what war means. We played in thought with its attractions. To-day, while the carnage is before our eyes, and we can know the truth about it, the call is loud, 'Choose between these two ways!'

All this has peculiar significance for those who, realizing the full horror of war, are inclined to throw on Germany the whole onus of guilt in this present crisis. We are told that she was the sole aggressor. We are told that that country has made herself the very embodiment of the idea that self-assertion is the way to glory, and having reached that conclusion, we allow every fresh day of horror to add to the passion with which we announce our repudiation of Germany and all her works.

The writer of this paper fully assents to the view that, in the last resort, it was the aggressive attitude of Germany that forced on an unwilling Europe this unholy strife. But ere we announce our repudiation of the whole spirit of self-assertion, ere we insist that we have no moral kinship with Germany, it would be well to look at ourselves afresh in the new light of these events.

Can it with any reality be said that we in this country have banished the war spirit, or are willing to banish the war spirit, from our own lives? It may turn out that while the special fruits of war make us shudder

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to-day, we have none the less cherished that same spirit, and that therefore we have no moral right to our indignant horror. Let us look in turn at several aspects of our own national life.

OUR SOCIAL LIFE

An outstanding feature of our social life is the division of our people into classes. Our schools and colleges are carefully planned, our cities are built, our very railways are adapted so as to maintain and foster the separation of those classes from each other. We must indeed thank God for the fact that we are just now more truly one people than we have been for centuries. But till the impact of this war shook the whole nation together, we hardly were one people. We were a number of different groups inhabiting one island, and the friction and misunderstanding between the groups was a permanent feature of our life. There was war in miniature within our own borders.

Now what lies behind class distinctions is just the deep-seated instinct that possesses like-minded people to separate themselves from others, and if need be to maintain themselves in opposition to others.

For the difficult, complex, and humbling task of joining ourselves to others until they and we make one body, we have had, for the most part, very little mind. Each class has had the will to work out its destiny, and to determine its life apart from the others. To each class the others have seemed in turn an obstruction, an affront, and a nuisance. Thousands have exercised their sympathy, their generosity, and their affection only within the limits of one circle. For those beyond its borders they have cultivated a stony stare and a special intonation of the voice. There has been real hatred in

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the heart of many a poor man towards the class that is now dominant in Britain, and there has been genuine and ill-concealed contempt in the hearts of many of those dominant ones toward the mass of working people.

This in moral reality is war. It is the clash of two self-assertions. It is 'Kaiserism' on a smaller scale.

OUR COMMERCIAL LIFE

In our commercial life have we ever repudiated the methods of self-assertion? Have we not rather loudly announced our approval of the war method?

That commercial world is filled by a million conflicting interests, but we have never believed either that they can be or that they ought to be reconciled. 'Let them fight it out' has been our motto, and we have believed that by fighting efficiency and justice would be attained. This is exactly what Bernhardt, the exponent of the philosophy of militarism, maintains as his chief thesis.

It has been plain for many days that this commercial method is wasteful, and leads to senseless overlapping. It is plain that it withdraws from the business of production a veritable army of men who are engaged merely in the details of the strife. It is plain that the method tortures the weak and hardens the strong. Yet it has been by many persistently maintained that the clash of commercial interests must be suffered to continue.

If here and there, in the name of mercy, we restrict the freedom of that competitive strife, we yet do it with a sigh, so dear to us is the idea of free fighting.

That mankind's commercial strivings should be harmonized into some great national or international activity, directed by deliberate reasoning and moral judgement, has seemed to us not only difficult but actually undesirable—

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so little has the man of commerce desired to be reconciled with his brother man, so greatly has he preferred to pursue his own good by the way of individual self-assertion.

The strife has indeed become cruelly severe of late. It has been getting more and more like actual war. Every year the lesser men in hundreds have been crushed by this commercial mill. They have slipped into poverty, and been lost to sight in the slums. It has been convenient to forget them. Every year, too, many of the conquerors have paid their own sad price for victory. Many bear openly the marks of a strife in which they have conquered only by suffering moral loss. Their audacious wish to domineer has sometimes been painfully obvious.

It is not necessary to judge them harshly as individuals. It is their fate that they suffer almost inevitably from the working of a method which is inherently bad, and which the individual cannot change.

Small wonder that those who know about both parties, who meet both the beaten and the victorious, are to-day wondering whether this method of strife can really be humanity's best! Can it really be that the human genius is incapable of conceiving and realizing some less wasteful and less remorseless method of life!

And now at last that question has become clamant. For now the clash of opposing commercial interests has flamed out into open war. The immediate occasion of this war must be distinguished from its ultimate causes, and among these latter, competing commercial interests and the struggle for markets have probably been conspicuous. Now, with its red reality before us, we are being compelled to ask afresh whether we still believe in basing commerce upon an activity of the war spirit.

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It will probably be found that millions who have believed in rivalry, calling it bracing and so forth, have believed in it only provided that it shall never produce its last inevitable result, and set the guns in motion. Now that blood is flowing they are horrified. But it is our idol, unfettered competition, that has done this thing, and just at this moment, when a tortured Europe groans in agony and the mind is oppressed by horror, we do well to ask ourselves whether we can still worship our idol. It is a fool's delusion to suppose that a world which accepts the clash of commercial interests as inevitable can ever be secure against the clash of arms. War, even with its horrors, is a rather cleaner thing than some of the other methods of commercial strife that have become common in late years, and war, be it never so horrible, is the inevitable and certain fruit of the order of things we have believed in. If we are to attain to a world purged of this horror, the man of commerce must face the task of fitting his personality into one world with his rivals, and of making a harmony instead of a discord out of their respective strivings.

THE INDUSTRIAL WORLD

In the industrial world the case is plainer than ever, for the war between labour and capital has become of late an open and an organized warfare.

Onlookers, seeing that both armies are needed for production, have indeed often asked why the claims of both parties could not be quietly weighed and reconciled in righteousness. But the onlookers so far have been largely impotent.

The actual combatants have accepted the method of fighting, and have been content to meet force with

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force. Strikes have been countered by lockouts. By one party violence up to the point of rioting has been openly advocated as a valuable method. Cruelly and in cold blood plans have been laid by the other party that relied for their success on the power of starvation lurking in the background. We feel to-day the horror of the policy of starvation when employed against a whole nation, but it has been used against masses of our own people again and again of late years. During the coal strike the distress in the Potteries was of the same kind as now exists in Belgium, though the shells were absent.

The real forces in this warfare are, on the one hand, the masterful desire of a small class, possessed of opportunity and training, to assert themselves and live their own lives on their own chosen lines, even though the cost to others should be cruel; and on the other hand an aspiration of the many, which is sometimes both greedy, violent, and very warlike, but which at bottom is wholesome, because it is really a demand for a life that shall be free, healthy, and adequate to man's nature. Till these interests are reconciled there will always be strife in our midst, and yet strife has not so far advanced us far towards justice.

No man who sanely considers the lot of our poorly-paid workers—of the million male workers paid 20s. a week or less—can accept that lot as fitting for a brother man. All who know it in detail know that it involves an outrage upon the nature of those who are in reality sons of God. But the great industrial corporations have been intent on industrial world-empire, and the claims of the workmen have been made a secondary matter.

We are apt to-day to see in the German Kaiser an

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embodiment of the spirit that lusts ruthlessly for dominion, and that would brush aside all obstructions, even though they be human lives. Consequently our language about him, both in the street and in the pulpit, does not lack either colour or vigour. Yet, even if we so estimate him correctly, he is only the political counterpart of the millionaire who has built his great industrial concern upon the ruins of a hundred smaller ones and the broken lives of uncounted workers. Both these types of men have believed sincerely in war. If our horror of war is sincere, we can tolerate neither.

It is true that some genuine passion for the weaker nations of Europe does to-day possess us, but if it is to remain sincere, it must become also a passion for the weaker workers at home. We realize the brutality of a war that has made nearly a whole nation homeless, and has tortured in both mind and body thousands of women and children. Can we continue to do that truly unless we confess also the brutality of a commercial method that tramples on weak women and unskilled men! In spite of real progress of late, there remain in our country thousands of sweated workers whose wages often fail to reach 7s. a week. If the story of the lives of many of these workers were to be told in detail it would make a companion volume to the story of Belgian sufferings to-day.

'MILITANCY'

It is strange indeed that another instance of the intrusion of the war spirit into our internal affairs should be afforded by certain phases of the suffrage movement. That movement, as a whole, has been eagerly welcomed by thousands just because they believed it would bring

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into a position of new authority that section of the nation most inclined and most fitted to use the methods of moral and spiritual authority, as opposed to the methods of compulsion. The strongest of all reasons why women should have the vote is to be found in the hope that their presence in the political world might lead to new measures for mitigating the cruelty and oppression of our industrial methods, and might infuse a more generous and humane spirit into public life. We sorely need more sympathy, more compassion, more delicate insight and understanding in our home administration generally.

It is, therefore, surely one of the strangest paradoxes of modern history that a large section of the workers in the Woman's movement should have so endorsed the war spirit, and employed war methods in so thorough-going a way. Many of them have openly declared that force is the only way to achieve the ends of justice in this matter. Thus they have appealed from reason and conscience to the sword, or to the nearest counterpart to it that they are able to wield.

It is of course equally true that men in turn have adopted military tactics of another kind. They have been content to entrench themselves behind precedent and prejudice, and sometimes they have used in a manner really tyrannous and insolent the advantage which thus was theirs.

But neither in this case nor in any other case do the methods of violence necessarily lead to justice. Justice is to be seen only by eyes cleared of passion, and secured only by those who can become strong in moral might. A body of men or women may 'rush' a position, and win by assault that which is not theirs by real right.

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But their possession of it in such a case does not make for human progress.

It may perhaps seem ungenerous even to refer to militant tactics at a time when, under the stress of a great national call, they have been suspended. The writer of this paper hopes indeed that they may never again, even in appearance, be needed. If the nation continues in its present mood, it is unthinkable that one half of the nation should continue to refuse to the other half an act of justice that is felt to be long overdue. But it remains a matter of real moment that we should, in the light of the war now raging, estimate rightly the real moral character of militant methods.

It continues to be one of the convictions of many men and women that Woman's true greatness lies in the direction of spiritual authority, and that she can use spiritual methods to accomplish results which can come about in no other way. When even a few women publicly repudiate that method, and instead acclaim the methods of warfare, the nation at once suffers spiritual loss. May one be allowed to express the hope that at least this lesson of the war will not be lost?

It is the war spirit in all its forms that is the essential enemy of our progress, and while we stand before a Europe made desolate, we surely need to repeat again and again that the conquest of the war spirit must be a spiritual triumph. Out of our own hearts it must be cast first, and the call to that humbling discipline is loud to-day. Secondly, it must be exorcized from our internal life, from our society, our industry, and our commerce. And only when that has been accomplished may we hope to possess the moral authority to prevent military strife,

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or the moral insight to choose for ourselves the ways that will avoid it. So long as we continue to believe that our good will come by way of self-assertion over against others, so long shall we have to meet in arms others who hold to the same tragic delusion.

A Europe without war must be a Europe in which each nation shall desire for all the other nations full liberty to express their genius and to exercise their vitality. It must be a Europe in which each nation will bend itself to reconciliation with all the others in a concert of life.

To bring such a state to pass will mean a very great spiritual achievement—one indeed so great that only those who believe that the risen Christ is eternally unconquerable will be able to believe it possible. But we shall have missed the lesson of this horror unless we let it set our hearts fixedly towards that spiritual achievement.

Once again, reform must begin at home. When we within our own Empire have learnt to live as one body, when our antagonisms to our own fellow citizens are reconciled, when we all desire each other's good—then, but not until then, shall we be ready for the greater world-wide unity into which war shall no more enter.